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THE BROTHERS D'AMOURS

by

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THE FIRST FRENCH SETTLERS ON THE ST. JOHN RIVER.

Most people in New Brunswick, when they speak of the first settlers on the River St. John refer to the Loyalists who came here in 1783, or to the New England men who settled at Maugerville and Sheffield twenty years earlier. Little is ever said, because but little is known, of those French inhabitants of the St. John river who were living on its banks a full century before the era of the Loyalists, and of whom we obtain very fleeting and uncertain glimpses in the official despatches sent by the commandants of Acadia to the French government. Yet these people cannot but be interesting to us who now inhabit the land which they made their home, and if the whole story of their trials and toils could be told we would no doubt find it as full



of romance as the world has found the story of Evangeline, as related by America's greatest poet. Unfortunately, there is no possibility of going into such details with regard to the early French settlers of the St. John as the poet was able to evolve from his imagination with reference to the fictitious heroine of the Acadian exile. Yet, enough can be gathered from the records of that time to give us a fairly accurate idea of the manner of men who were living on this great river, amidst the vast Acadian wilderness, two hundred years ago.

In 1670 Acadia, which had been seized by the English in 1654, was restored to the French under the terms of the treaty of Breda, and the Chevalier de Grand Fontaine became governor of the colony. The English had held Acadia for sixteen years, yet they had done nothing to increase the number of its inhabitants, and when their fishing establishments were broken up and their forts surrendered to the French, no traces of their occupation remained, with the exception of the fort at Jemseg which they had built, and which was nothing more than a post for trading with the Indians. Fort Jemseg stood on the east side of the St. John river, and just south of the entrance to Grand Lake. It was 120 feet long by 90 wide, enclosed by pickets 18 feet in height. On it were mounted four small guns, and within it was a house for the garrison 60 ft. by 30. Old Fort Latour, at the mouth of the river, was then in ruins, and in 1670 there does not appear to have been a single settler, French or English, on the banks of the St. John from the Bay of Fundy to the river's source. Rich as the territory was in every natural resource, its very vastness and the gloom of the impenetrable forest which shaded the waters of the great river seem to have deterred the humble tiller of the soil from seeking a home there. The great solitude was only broken by the passing of the canoe of the savage or the

movement of the wild animals of the wooded wilderness.

The commandant on the St. John river in 1670 was Pierre de Joibert, seigneur de Soulanges and Marson, an officer in the French army who had married a daughter of Chartier de Lotbiniere, who had been attorney general of New France. Joibert, although he lived but eight years in Acadia, for he died in 1678, has substantial claims to recognition as an historical figure for he was the father of Elizabeth Joibert, who was born in old Fort Latour in 1673, and who became the wife of the Marquis de Vaudreuil, governor general of Canada, and the mother of the second Marquis de Vaudreuil who was the last French governor of Canada. Joibert seems to have wished to become an Acadian seigneur, and he was the first grantee of territory in that part of Acadia now known as New Brunswick, under the terms of the edict made by Louis XIV. on the 20th May 1676. This document authorized Count Frontenac, the governor general, to grant lands in New France, on condition that they should be cleared within six years. Such a condition was impossible of fulfilment, for the grants were too large to be cleared within the time specified unless the grantees had been able to place a host of tenants upon them. On the 12th Oct. 1676, Joibert, who is described in the document as major of Pentagoet (Penobscot) and commandant of the forts of Gemisick (Jemseg) and the river St. John, received a grant of a seignory called Nachouac, to be hereafter called Soulanges, fifteen leagues from Gemisick, two leagues front on each side of the St. John River, and two leagues deep inland. This grant which contained upwards of 46,000 acres of land, embraced not only the territory occupied by Mr. Gibson's town of Marysville, but also the site of Fredericton, St. Mary's and Gibson, so that if Joibert's heirs could lay

claim to it now they would be multi-millionaires. Four days after the issue of this grant, Joibert obtained a second concession granting him the house or fort of Gemisick, with a league on each side of the fort, making two leagues front on the river and two leagues in depth inland. This second grant was just one half the size of the first, yet it formed a noble domain and included a fort which might easily have been made a formidable place of strength.

When Joibert died in 1678 it does not appear that he had done anything to improve or settle the valuable territory which had been granted to him by the French king. His widow and her children returned to Canada, and we hear nothing more of her in connexion with the affairs of Acadia until 1691, when she received a grant of land on the River St. John of four leagues in front on the river and two leagues in depth, and opposite the grant of M. de Chauffours (called Jemseck) the centre of the grant being opposite the house at Jemseck. This document shows that the grants to Joibert had been escheated or lapsed, and that the territory they embraced had been regranted to other persons. The new grant to the widow was probably intended to compensate her in some measure for the loss of the land granted to her husband, but it does not appear that she ever occupied it or that she was able to sell it to a good purchaser. Land was then too easily obtained from the government to be of much value as a saleable commodity when in private hands.

The Sieur de Chauffours who was in the occupation of the Jemseg territory in 1691 was one of four brothers who had come to Acadia from Quebec in 1684, or perhaps a year or two earlier. They were sons of Mathieu d'Amours, a native of Brittany who emigrated to Quebec and became a member of the Governor's Council in 1663. He was created a member of the Canadian

Noblesse. From his position in the Council, d'Amours was naturally an influential personage, and, like many a modern public man, he used his power to promote the fortunes of his sons. They all received large grants of land in Acadia, and they all resided on the St. John River where they had very extensive possessions. Louis d'Amours, who assumed the territorial name of Sieur des Chauffours had a grant of the Richibucto and Buctouche Rivers, but he afterwards became possessed of the Jemseg seigniory which had been granted to Joibert. Rene d'Amours, Sieur de Clignacourt, in 1684, obtained a grant of land on the River St. John from Medoctec to the Longue Sault, two leagues in depth on each side. In the same year Mathieu d'Amours, Sieur de Freneuse, was granted the land along the River St. John between Gemesick and Nachouc, two leagues deep on each side of the river. In 1695 Bernard d'Amours, Sieur de Plenne received a grant of the Kennebecasis River "with a league and a half on each side of the said river, by two leagues in depth, and the islands and islets adjacent." Six years earlier the same territory had been granted to Pierre Chesnet, Sieur du Breuil, a resident of Port Royal, but this grant seems to have lapsed because the conditions as to settlement had not been complied with. At all events Bernard d'Amours got the territory which du Breuil had possessed and the latter did not come to this side of the Bay of Fundy.

The four brothers d'Amours may be properly regarded as the first settlers on the River St. John who were not officers of the government. Governor Villebon found them here when he came to Acadia in 1690, and he appears to have conceived a strong prejudice against them. Writing to the minister in Paris in 1695 he complains of the brothers d'Amours, whom he calls *soi disants gentil hommes*. He says,—“They are four

in number living on the St. John River. They are given up to licentiousness and independence for ten or twelve years they have been here. They are disobedient and seditious and require to be watched." In another paper it is stated of the d'Amours that "although they have vast grants in the finest parts of the country, they have hardly a place to lodge in. They carry on no tillage, keep no cattle, but live in trading with the Indians and debauch among them, making large profits thereby, but injuring the public good." A year later we find Villebon again writing to the minister in the same strain. "I have," says he, "no more reason to be satisfied with the Sieurs d'Amours than I previously had. The one that has come from France has not pleased me more than the other two. Their minds are wholly spoiled by long licentiousness, and the manners they have acquired among the Indians; and they must be watched closely, as I had the honor to state to you last year."

It would not be quite fair to judge of the character of the d'Amours brothers by these statements, although Governor Villebon doubtless made them in good faith. Acadia, at that time, was so full of jealousies and cabals that no man escaped censure, not even Villebon himself. The French government encouraged the forwarding of complaints to France, not only against private parties but against their own officials; and the French archives are full of letters written by all sorts and conditions of men against the governors, the judges, the priests and against each other. The d'Amours were engaged in trading with the Indians and this was enough to raise the ire of the governor, who deemed such conduct an infringement of the monopoly of the company which was supposed to control the trade of Acadia. But as this company did not provide a sufficient amount of goods and sold them at exorbitant

prices, nearly every person in Acadia was engaged in trading, or at all events, every person was accused of it, even Villebon himself being charged with having secret transactions with the English in the sale of furs. Even the captains of the men-of-war which arrived from France every year with supplies for the fort were engaged in trade, for they brought out goods for the traders in Acadia who were ruining the company's business.

Fortunately we are not without the means of correcting Villebon's statement that the d'Amours brothers had hardly a place to lodge in, kept no cattle and carried on no tillage. In August 1689 a little English boy named John Gyles, then nine years old, was taken prisoner in an Indian raid against Pemaquid, in Maine, and carried to Acadia. He remained six years a captive among the Indians of the Upper St. John, but in 1695 was sold as a slave to Louis d'Amours de Chauffours, the oldest of the d'Amours brothers. Gyles lived with this man for more than three years, and served him so faithfully that, at the end of that time, he gave him his freedom and sent him back to his people in New England. So far from having hardly a place to lodge in, Louis d'Amours at that time had quite an extensive establishment. His residence was at Jemseg on the east side of the St. John river and he seems to have lived in much comfort. Gyles, who published a narrative of his captivity many years afterwards, says that he did a great trade with the Indians and kept a store of which the English captive had charge while he lived there. He also possessed cattle and raised crops, and Gyles mentions particularly one very fine field of wheat of which the birds had made great havoc. Louis d'Amours was married to Margaret Guion, a native of Quebec, and they had two children when Gyles lived with them. This lady treated the poor English captive

with great kindness, and the narrative of Gyles, which has been widely circulated, has handed her name down to the present day as that of a good and true woman.

Mathieu d'Amours, *Sieur de Freneuse*, lived on the east side of the St. John river opposite the mouth of the Oromocto. Gyles stopped a night at his house in 1695, but he gives us no details as to how he lived. The fact that he had his residence in this fine farming country, rather than in a place more convenient for trading, would lead us to infer that he engaged largely in agriculture. His wife was Louise Guion, a sister of the wife of Louis d'Amours, and they had several children. Louise Guion, under the name of Madame Freneuse, occupies a large space in Acadian history, and for nearly ten years there was hardly a despatch or letter sent from Acadia to France which did not contain some reference to her. Unfortunately these references were not always complimentary, for Madame Freneuse was a sort of Acadian Cleopatra who came near undermining the foundations of the little colony. One commandant she ruined and the Port Royal colony was kept in a continual state of ferment over her, for she had partizans and defenders as well as unrelenting enemies,

Rene d'Amours, *Sieur de Clignacourt*, who had a large grant of territory on the Upper St. John, does not appear to have lived upon it, but probably resided with his brother Mathieu. Bernard, about the year 1701, married Jeanne le Borgne, a grand daughter of Charles de la Tour, the most striking figure in Acadian history. Rene appears to have been in France in 1696 or earlier; he was probably the youngest of the four brothers. Like his brother Louis he was engaged in trading with the Indians. John Gyles, in his narrative, informs us that when he was residing with the Indians at Medoc-tec—"when they would come in from hunting they

would be drunk and fight for several days and nights together, until they had spent most of their skins in wine and brandy, which was brought to the village by a Frenchman called Monsieur Sigenioncour." The reader will easily recognize in this name that of Rene d'Amours, Sieur de Clignacourt. Perhaps we may discern in this statement, also, the principal reason for Villebon's dissatisfaction with the d'Amours brothers. A man who was engaged in selling the Indians wine and brandy, and keeping them drunk for days until he had obtained from them all the furs they had gathered in the winter's hunt, was not likely to be a favorite with the Acadian governor. Yet the time soon came when Villebon had good reason for looking on the d'Amours with some degree of favor for at a very critical period they rendered essential service to him and to the state.

In 1696 Villebon was established with a garrison of one hundred men at Fort Nashwaak, which was then the head quarters of Acadia. It had been chosen because it was near the principal Indian villages, and so far from the mouth of the St. John river that it could not be easily attacked by the English of Boston, with whom a constant state of war existed. The story of the combats which were carried on between 1690 and 1700 between Villebon and the English would make a paper of itself, and therefore I shall not touch upon it further than as it relates to the fortunes of our first settlers, the d'Amour's brothers. If settlement was tardy on the St. John River it was not without good cause, for the tiller of the soil above all things needs peace to enable him to prosper, and he is not likely to be content to live in a land where his fields are being constantly ravaged by an enemy, his buildings burnt and his cattle killed or driven away. Yet that was what he might expect if he lived on the banks of the St. John two hundred years ago.

The English made several attacks on Acadia during the last decade of the seventeenth century, but the principal one was in 1696. An expedition was fitted out at Boston in the autumn of that year and placed under the command of Col. Benjamin Church who had been a commander in the Indian war of 1675, generally known as King Phillip's war. Church had about five hundred men with him and they were embarked in open sloops and boats. They ravaged the coast of Acadia from Passamaquoddy to the head of the Bay of Fundy, and were on their way back to Boston when they were met by a reinforcement of two hundred men in three vessels under Col. Hathorne, one of the Massachusetts Council. Hathorne, who now took the chief command, had orders to beseige and capture Fort Nashwaak, and the expedition returned to the St. John for that purpose, and ascended the river. Villebon was attacked in his fort on the 18th of October, but after cannonading it for two days the English retired. Villebon was ably assisted in the defence of his fort by two of the d'Amour's brothers, Mathieu and Rene, who arrived on the evening before the English appeared, with ten Frenchmen, their servants and retainers. Louis d'Amours was in France at this time and he had left his affairs in the care of his faithful English slave John Gyles, then a lad of sixteen. I doubt whether I can tell the story of what occurred to the family of Louis d'Amours during this English invasion better than in the words of Gyles himself, who in the narrative of his captivity * describes the affair thus:—

Some time after, Col. Hathorne attempted the taking of the French fort up this river. We heard of him some time before he came up, by the guard which Governor Villebon had stationed at the river's mouth. Monsieur, my master, had gone to France, and madam, his wife, advised with me. She desired me to nail a paper on the door of her house, which paper read as follows:

"I entreat the general of the English not to burn my house or barn, nor

* *Nine Years a Captive*, by James Hannay, St. John, 1875—(Reprint from Drake, with compiler's notes.)

destroy my cattle. I don't suppose that such an army comes here to destroy a few inhabitants, but to take the fort above us. I have shown kindness to the English captives, as we were capacitated, and have bought two, of the Indians and sent them to Boston. We have one now with us, and he shall go also when a convenient opportunity presents, and he desires it."

When I had done this, madam said to me, "Little English," [which was the familiar name she used to call me by,] "we have shown you kindness, and now it lies in your power to serve or disserve us, as you know where our goods are hid in the woods, and that monsieur is not home. I could have sent you to the fort and put you under confinement, but my respect to you and your assurance of love to us have disposed me to confide in you, persuaded you will not hurt us or our affairs. And, now, if you will not run away to the English, who are coming up the river, but serve our interest, I will acquaint monsieur of it on his return from France, which will be very pleasing to him; and I now give my word, you shall have liberty to go to Boston on the first opportunity, if you desire, it or any other favor in my power shall not be denied you." I replied:

"Madame, it is contrary to the nature of the English to requite evil for good. I shall endeavor to serve you and your interest. I shall not run to the English, but if I am taken by them I shall willingly go with them, and yet endeavor not to disserve you either in your person or goods."

The place where we lived was called Hagimsack, twenty-five leagues from the river's mouth, as I have before stated.

We now embarked and went in a large boat and canoe two or three miles up an eastern branch of the river that comes from a large pond, and on the following evening sent down four hands to make discovery. And while they were sitting in the house the English surrounded it and took one of the four. The other three made their escape in the dark and through the English soldiers, and coming to us, gave a surprising account of affairs. Upon this news madam said to me, "Little English, now you can go from us, but I hope you will remember your word." I said, "Madam be not concerned. I will not leave your in this strait." She said, "I know not what to do with my two poor little babies." I said, "Madam, the sooner we embark and go over the great pond the better." Accordingly we embarked and went over the pond.* The next day we spoke with Indians, who were in a canoe, and they gave us an account that Signecto town was taken and burnt. Soon after we heard the great guns at Gov. Villibon's fort, which the English engaged several days. They killed one man, then drew off down the river; fearing to continue longer, for fear of being frozen in for the winter, which in truth they would have been.

Hearing no report of cannon for several days, I, with two others, went down to our house to make discovery. We found our young lad who was taken by the English when they went up the river. The general had shown himself so honorable, that on reading the note on our door, he ordered it not to be burnt, nor the barn. Our cattle and other things he preserved, except one or two and the poultry for their use. At their return they ordered the young lad to be put on shore. Finding things in this posture, we returned and gave madam an account of it.

Here we are brought face to face with the realities

*This "great pond" was Grand Lake.

of war and the fears and miseries it brought to those who were its victims in ancient Acadia. It is pleasing to know that the fidelity of John Gyles to his mistress did not go unrewarded. When his master returned from France in the spring of 1697, he thanked Gyles for the care he had taken of his affairs, and said he would endeavor to fulfil the promise which his wife had made. Accordingly in the following year, after peace had been proclaimed, an English sloop from Boston came to the mouth of the St. John river and Louis d'Amours sent Gyles back in her to his people from whom he had been parted about nine years.

Mathieu d'Amours did not fare so well as his brother. As he had taken part in the defence of Fort Nashwaak, the English in coming down the river burnt his residence and barns at Freneuse and killed his cattle. The Sieur de Freneuse was left without a house and was wholly ruined, but this was not all the price he had to pay for his loyalty to his country and his king. The exposure to which he was subjected during the seige brought on an illness from which he died, leaving a widow and a large family of young children to struggle as best they might against the world's troubles and cares. Rene d'Amours, the other brother who had taken part in the defence of Fort Nashwaak, had also been ruined by the English invasion, for his goods, which were stored at Freneuse, were seized or destroyed. He afterwards joined the Indian war parties that were making raids on the English settlements of Maine. Thus the ruin wrought by war brings about reprisals and breeds more ruin and destruction of life and property.

In 1698, Governor Villebon removed his garrison from Fort Nashwaak to the old fort at the mouth of the river, on the Carleton side of the harbor, which had been originally built by Latour. Villebon died there

in the summer of 1700 and his successor Brouillan, who arrived at St. John in the summer of the following year, resolved to abandon the fort there and remove the military establishment to Port Royal. This was immediately done, and as a consequence the settlers on the St. John were left without protection. As the war between France and England was renewed in the spring of 1702, these unfortunate people had no resource but to abandon their properties on the St. John and remove to Port Royal. By this time it appears that Margaret Guion, the wife of Louis d'Amours, was dead, for her sister, Madame Freneuse, had taken charge of her children and was providing for them. These children were indeed in a bad plight and were destined soon to be doubly orphaned. Their father was made prisoner by the English in 1703 and taken to Boston where he was confined in prison for more than two years. When he was liberated, under the terms of an exchange, and returned to Port Royal he was broken in health as in fortune and soon afterwards died. We learn this fact from an entry in the register of the parish of Port Royal recording the marriage of "Pierre de Morpain, commander of the Marquis de Beaupre, on 13th August, 1709, to Mdle. Marie d'Amour de Chauffour, daughter of the late Louis d'Amour, ecuyer, and Sieur de Chauffour, and of the late dame Marguerite Guyon".

Madame Freneuse, who had not only her own large family to look after but also the children of her sister, appears to have removed to Port Royal about the time of the transfer of the garrison to that place. In 1701 she was a petitioner to the French government for a pension on the ground of the death of her husband and the losses he had suffered by the English invasion. Two of her sons were at that time cadet-soldiers of the companies in the Port Royal garrison, so Madame

Freneuse must then have been nearly forty. Yet she had captivated the too susceptible heart of M. de Bonaventure, a brave naval officer, who was in command of the King's ships on the coast of Acadia. Nor does it appear that Governor Brouillan was insensible to her blandishments, for he shielded her in every possible way and defended her from her enemies. The French government encouraged what may be properly described as the "pimp" system, so that every person in Acadia was a spy on some one else. In November 1702 we find de Goutins, the commissary of Port Royal, in a letter to the French government, complaining of a scandal caused by Madame Freneuse and Bonaventure. This story was repeated by others and the priests of Port Royal brought the matter to the notice of the Bishop of Quebec who wrote to the French minister suggesting that Madame Freneuse be sent to Canada. In the autumn of 1703 Madame Freneuse had a child, but the infant was spirited away and kept at the residence of an inhabitant who lived up the river of Port Royal. Brouillan, the governor, was, however, aware of the affair, and so was one of the priests for the child was baptized by the name of Antoine on the 7th Sept. 1703. Yet all through these proceedings Madame Freneuse, instead of manifesting an humble and contrite spirit, held her head high, and her partizans, who included the two most influential men in the colony, the Governor and Bonaventure, made it uncomfortable for any one who dared to look unkindly upon her. Among the letters in our archives is one from Pontif, Surgeon Major of Port Royal, to the Minister, complaining of the ill treatment which he had received from Bonaventure on account of Madame Freneuse. Even M. de LaTour, the seigneur of Port Royal, and the principal man in the colony, was made to realize the danger of offending a friend of Bonaventure, for in a letter to

the Minister he protests against his interdiction and attributes it to the fact that neither he nor his wife had visited Madame Freneuse. In the autumn of 1704, Madame Freneuse was sent by Governor Brouillan to the River St. John, but she soon returned, alleging that she could not live there because the place was deserted. Brouillan had been ordered to send her to Quebec, but he excused himself on the ground that he had no opportunity of doing so. A journey from Port Royal to Quebec was a serious matter in those days. For nearly a year the cause of all this trouble lived up the river, at a distance from Port Royal, at the house of an inhabitant, but in the autumn of 1705 she went to France. She did not remain there very long, for she was again at Port Royal in the summer of 1706, and was the subject of much correspondence. Subercase, who had succeeded Brouillan as Governor, required her to live at a distance from Port Royal, but she seems to have returned to it occasionally. It was not until the summer of 1708 that the instructions of the French government with regard to this remarkable woman were carried out and she was sent to Quebec.

It might be supposed that this would be the last heard of Madame Freneuse in Acadia, for Quebec was a place which no person could leave without the consent of the Governor General. But this Acadian widow was quite irrepressible, and it would almost seem as if she had become as influential with the Quebec authorities as she was with the leading personages in Acadia. After the capture of Port Royal by the English in 1710 she turned up as an emissary of the French government, and the attempt which was made in the summer of 1711 by the French inhabitants and Indians to recapture that place was thought to be due to instructions she had brought from Canada. Major Paul Mascarene, an officer of the Annapolis garrison who afterwards



became Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, in his narrative of the events of 1710 and 1711 at Annapolis, has the following reference to Madame Freneuse.

About this time they dispatcht almost unknown to us—the "prieet" from Manis to Canada with an Acco't as may be supposed, of all this—and at the same time, a certain woman by name "Madam Freneuse,"—came from the other side of the Bay of Fundy in a Birch Canoo, with only an Indian and a young Lad, her son—in the Coldest part of Winter. This woman as there is a great deal of Reason to believe was Sent by Ordrs from Canada, brought by Mr. St. Castine—to keep the French in a Ferment and make them backward in supplying the Garrison with any necessary's and pry into and give an Accot of our Secrets, till occasion should offer of endeavouring to drive us out of the Country. In all this indeed She was but too lucky, tho she came with quite another story at first, she said that want of all manner of necessary's had put her to the Extremity of venturing all—for all to cross the Bay—at that unseasonable time of the year—that the Indians of penobscot—were entirely Starving, and that she was forc'd to come to try whether she could be admitted to live undr the new Govenmt she was upon this received Very Kindly by Sr. Chas. Hobby—and had the Liberty she desired granted to her.

Here we obtain our last glimpse of the first French settlers of the St. John River, for the documents in the archives of Acadia make no further mention of Madame Freneuse. That river had ceased to be a French possession and more than half a century was destined to pass away before the first English settler made his appearance on its banks. All the surviving members of the d'Amours family doubtless returned to Quebec, their original home; their graves are there; the fields they cleared were soon reclaimed by the wilderness. Yet, if in telling what is known of their story, I have awakened an interest in the mind of the reader in the men and manners of that bygone time, this paper will not have been written in vain.

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